

# Class Struggle

The Workers' Republic Women's Liberation International Socialism

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Group  
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MRCI  
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## Firefighters Strike... SOLD OUT BY UNION LEADERS



## Extend Student Action

USI's call for a one day national strike on March 9 targets the cuts in education and the exclusion of the vast majority of young people from third level education. Fees are now so high that thousands of students have applied to English colleges - they find it cheaper to move to England than pay Irish fees!

Grants are so low that they are irrelevant to most students, who must depend on their parents for the education which should be their right. Throughout the third level sector all staff face the threat of job cuts while their wages are already kept down by the so-called Plan for National Recovery.

Students in France, Spain and Austria have shown how these assaults on education can be fought. In France in 1987 when the Chirac government tried to introduce fees students took to the streets in

their thousands, faced down police attempts to intimidate them and shamed the trade unions into supporting them. Chirac withdrew.

Similarly in Spain national strike action led by school students forced the state to back down on its plans to cut education. In Austria similar action was only defused when after two weeks of a national student strike the Student Union leaders diverted the action into ineffective negotiations.

The national demonstration in Dublin on February 17 showed that there are thou-

sands of students angered by the cuts and willing to fight. More than five thousand students from all around the country travelled to Dublin. Many of these had been involved in occupations, pickets and other protest action around the country over the previous months. Some had already faced brutal police reaction including assaults and arrests.

What is needed now is to build for indefinite national strike action. Nothing was done to follow that up except to call a single national day of action. The thousands of students willing to act must be mobilised to persuade as many as possible of the 110,000 third level students in Ireland to take part. Students should fight for joint action with college workers

### Inside -

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- Afghanistan - What's at Stake?

THE FIREFIGHTERS' STRIKE was potentially the most important struggle yet against Haughey's economic onslaught on the whole working class. However, after seven weeks of solid mass strike action since Jan 22nd, the 760 Dublin firefighters were suddenly demobilised just a week after their decision to step up the action.

As admitted by the IMETU officials, the strikers were conceded only part of their demands. The union leaders had from the start publicly tried to play down the strikers' opposition to cuts and to plead it as a special

case due to the critical nature of the fire-fighting services. Many of the contentious issues are not resolved but merely deferred to further review. But the key principle for which they struck — against covering for unfilled vacancies — has been surrendered by the leaders. After all it was they who engineered the so-called 'voluntary redundancy' deal for 10,000 public service workers over the heads of the rank and file.

On Tuesday 1st March the workers were called to separate mass meetings of the two union sections and confronted with "settlement" terms which they had not been allowed to hear or discuss beforehand. The union officials first leaned on the strike committee to recommend the deal, amid reports that the top bosses of the FWUI were regretting the strike action and unwilling to put any more resources into it.

Then the workers were pressed into a secret ballot at a meeting dominated by the officials. Only a small section were able to hold firm against the sell-out in the FWUI, while the smaller section of IMETU members gave the deal a more difficult passage.

The terms of the final deal had been worked out directly between cronies William Attley of the FWUI and Minister for Labour Bertie Ahern. This was done in secret over the heads of the workers and of their elected committee. They were desperate to stitch up a deal precisely because the strike was on the brink of spreading — the one thing they did not want above all.

### SOLIDARITY

Firefighters from the north had joined others from services throughout the Republic in an important demonstration of solidarity on the streets of Dublin. Shamefully, however, neither Dublin Trades Council nor the FWUI nor IMETU called for demonstrations by wider sections of workers alongside them. Support from firefighters abroad began to grow. But the cosy salaried industrial-relations brokers who dominate the unions tried to make a dirty word of 'militancy' in case rank and file action cramped their room for compromise and sell-out.

On Feb. 20th settlement proposals had been thrown

out massively by the rank and file. Activists were rightly incensed at the warnings of union officials not to 'rush into a rejection' because 'they were taking on the whole state'. The truth is that the state had taken on the strikers — using the army to break their action — and the only reaction of the union leaders was to score points about the soldiers' lack of training and equipment.

The new secret negotiations took place under the looming shadow of a national stoppage of firefighters, a stoppage in the hospitals against ambulance drivers scabbing on the strike, and the ICTU's decision on an all-out picket to bring out senior fire officials who were helping the army. But to have waited 6 weeks before requesting this official picket was scandalous evidence of the bureaucrats' attempt to use the minimum action so as to wear down the strikers' endurance by allowing an alternative fire service to operate.

### LESSONS

These strikers were the only group yet to take all-out action against the direct effects of public spending cuts. But the same local authority that employs the firefighters was meanwhile slashing services and jobs in many other departments. The government announced on Feb 19th that 40,000 (one-third) of the entire publicly-owned housing stock is to be sold off to tenants, with the immediate aim of massively cutting housing maintenance with the loss of hundreds of jobs.

What the union leaders feared most was especially the spread of militant strike action to these sections. On their last time out, Corporation workers physically resisted Army intervention on the streets.

The fight against the cuts must now be taken up by these workers especially through all-out strike action. But they must learn the lessons of how the firefighters were undermined. Their own elected and recallable delegates must be put in complete charge of the strike committee and all talks. No secret talks!

The strikers' own delegates must directly appeal for militant solidarity and not have it deferred endlessly by the union bureaucrats. And the unaccountably officials must be openly forced by the strikers to mobilise all possible resources of their unions to resist the cuts.

Force these bureaucrats to break their treacherous pact with Haughey, or force them out of the unions!

## EDITORIAL

**FAR FROM BEING IN TATTERS**, the Anglo-Irish Agreement remains the firm basis of collaboration between the British state and the Irish nationalist bourgeoisie. That this should be the case *despite* a whole series of new outrages against nationalists — most recently the killing of Aidan McAnespie and the re-instatement of private Thain — is due in no small way to the bankruptcy of Republican politics.

Thatcher, Hume, Fine Gael and now Haughey have prosecuted the Anglo-Irish strategy with exceptional determination over the past two and a half years, for it was their only hope of clamping the lid down on the 20-year-long nationalist revolt which threatens the stability of both states in Ireland.

The Agreement aims to reconstruct the political mould in the Six Counties. Its end goal is to incorporate constitutional nationalists into a form of joint rule with a Unionist establishment reined-in by direct rule from London and by deepening economic dependency on Britain. It was dressed up in lying promises that it would remove the grievances of the oppressed nationalists, while in substance it attempted to politically marginalise and militarily crush the Republican movement.

Its creeping progress on all fronts was facilitated by the political response of the Republicans. They continued with their stalemated guerrilla war on the one hand while on the other hand they appealed to the SDLP, the Catholic clergy and the ranks of Fianna Fáil for

an alliance to demand a British 'declaration of intent' to withdraw from Ireland.

**ENNISKILLEN**

Turning their backs on the working class and against struggle on the social and economic fronts, the Republicans made no concrete gains whatever from their pleading with constitutional nationalism, even in the extradition campaign when sections of Fianna Fáil were deeply uneasy. On the other hand, their elitist guerrilla campaign led to the disaster of Enniskillen which gave the biggest mileage ever to the Anglo-Irish strategy. Enniskillen even neutralised the passive nationalism of the Fianna Fáil camp which had been making it difficult for

*Anti-Extradition march in Dublin in the wake of the Birmingham Six and Stalker events*



PHOTO DEREK SPEIRS/REPORT

**THE IRISH WORKERS GROUP** is a revolutionary communist organisation basing itself upon the programme and principles developed by Karl Marx and F. Engels in the last century, by V.I. Lenin and the first four Congresses of the Communist International (1919-23), and by Leon Trotsky and the first two Congresses of the Fourth International up to 1948.

Only the working class can lead the oppressed masses of the planet to the achievement of the historic task of a planned world economy based on human need rather than on the blind private accumulation of profits. To do so requires a social revolution that expropriates capitalist property and smashes the armed power of the capitalist class, namely its state, replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat, founded upon workers' councils and the armed militia of the working class.

Whilst starting from the immediate tasks facing the workers and peasants - which in the colonial and semi-colonial world includes the land question and national independence - such a revolution must be permanent, for it cannot stop at intermediate "democratic" stages without the working class suffering a heavy defeat. The political power of the proletariat (in alliance with the other oppressed classes such as the poor peasants) is essential to resolve these "capitalist" tasks as well as to move forwards towards a planned economy and socialism. The latter is indeed impossible to achieve within any national territory. Thus the revolution must be international. Its fundamental task is its own extension.

**Workers' States**

The so-called "communist" countries are in fact degenerate workers' states — the USSR, E. Europe, China, Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea. They are workers' states because the

bourgeoisie has been overthrown and capitalist exploitation has been suppressed. Yet their planned economies remain fundamentally hampered by a parasitic caste of bureaucrats, thus blocking the road towards socialist development. This caste has usurped political power from the proletariat and pursues a counter-revolutionary strategy under the label of "socialism in one country". The "Communist parties" in these states, and their supporters throughout the world are Stalinists.

As revolutionary communists (Trotskyists) we place no conditions on our active defence of the degenerate workers' states. We fight internationally to become a force for political revolution within them to smash the bureaucratic caste and to restore in the USSR, and to create in the others, workers' democracy based on soviets, workers' councils.

**Workers' Movement**

In the advanced capitalist states, the proletariat is repeatedly held back from the struggle for power by the social democratic or Labour parties, the trade union bureaucracy, and the Stalinist parties.

These bodies, while based on the workers' organisations, pursue a bourgeois policy, sacrificing the historic aims of the proletariat to reforms within capitalism. However, in periods of crisis, capitalism tries to recoup these concessions.

If the working class is to successfully fight the renewed capitalist offensive, its own crisis of leadership must be resolved in a revolutionary direction. To this end we fight inside the workers' movements to link existing struggles, even ones for partial demands, to the struggle for working class power. In each struggle for pay, against closures, for public works, for political rights, we fight for forms of organisation and elements

Haughey to ratify extradition to Britain at the end of November.

But from that point on the inherent contradictions of Britain's imperialist role in Ireland burst out in one incident after another which remobilised nationalist anger throughout Ireland. Many of the gains of the Anglo-Irish process at the level of propaganda and ideology were suddenly set back if not wiped out. The treatment of Irish people framed for or charged with 'terrorism' in Britain was already a source of simmering indignation when the rejection of the Birmingham Six appeal caused it to boil over. But it was Mayhew's decision that RUC murderers caught out in their perjury would not be

prosecuted which most sharply put Haughey's position under strain.

The Irish Anti-Extradition Campaign suddenly came to life again. However, as this paper last month warned, the revival of the campaign was built on sand because it reaffirmed Sinn Féin's line of appealing to Fianna Fáil and the Church.

A week later the campaign put 5,000 people on the streets against extradition, against Thatcher and against the RUC. But it openly and deliberately addressed all its appeals to nationalist middle class opinion and to the ranks of Fianna Fáil.

There was not even the beginning of an attempt to turn the mass anger against the

constitutional nationalist leaders whose commitment to the Anglo-Irish strategy is total. It is they who extradite into the hands of police who beat and frame their victims, judges who obligingly put them away for life, and governments which cover up secret murder by their security forces. Indeed, the southern Irish state is itself just as adept in the use of beatings, framings and cover-ups in its war against Republicans!

**ILLUSIONS**

As a result, Republican illusions in Fianna Fáil have helped Haughey to hold nationalist sentiment firmly in tow as he battled to keep the Anglo-Irish strategy intact. He was thus positively aided in

diverting popular anger into diplomatic rhetoric, allowing British imperialism to carry on its dirty war and to carry on covering it up.

All but the politically blind must surely see, after the annual Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis, that there is nothing to be gained by a campaign strategy which places its hopes in the rank and file of that party being won to anti-imperialist struggle. There was not a hint of opposition at the Ard Fheis to Haughey. Thus when Aidan McAnespie was brutally murdered by British soldiers in broad daylight on the open road at Aughnacloy while that conference was closing in Dublin, the Cardinal, the Church and Haughey were well placed to defuse the renewed wave of anger with their empty rhetoric and posturing.

The Anglo-Irish strategy remains firmly intact, with Haughey clearly on the high ground politically. Republican strategy must bear the blame for that. The IWG fights for an alternative, that is, for the central orientation to be to the working class, with an open fight for industrial action as the key to rallying the widest forces and the communities north and south against extradition and repression. At the anti-Extradition conference the 'far-left' groups refused to actively back such an alternative. But such a strategy has always been the *only* basis for *really* challenging the ruling class and imperialism. Therefore, however difficult to begin and however long it might take, it must be undertaken urgently and seriously.

of workers' control that bring workers united into conflict not only with an individual capitalist but with capitalist power and the capitalist system. Through transitional demands and forms of organisation the masses can find a bridge between their present struggles for everyday demands and the tasks of socialist revolution.

In the trade unions we fight for their total independence from the state, for militant class struggle policies, for immediate, partial and transitional demands which link today's struggles under capitalism to a united and coherent offensive to overthrow it.

As revolutionary communists (Trotskyists) we place no conditions on our active defence of the degenerate workers' states. We fight internationally to become a force for political revolution within them to smash the bureaucratic caste and to restore in the USSR, and to create in the others, workers' democracy based on soviets, workers' councils.

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**National Struggle**

On the basis of these international communist principles we give unconditional support to all national liberation struggles against imperialism, while not hiding our political criticisms of their programmes. Within the oppressed countries, where such struggles are led by non-proletarian leaderships the tasks of communists to fight for leadership of the struggle renders our support for such forces conditional as well as critical.

In Ireland we defend the revolutionary nationalist Republican Movement against imperialist

• We fight for the most complete separation of church and state, an end to church control of schools, hospitals and other social institutions. We fight against every confessional or sectarian expression in the workers' organisations.

**Sexual Oppression**

• We fight for complete social, legal and political equality for women. Equal pay for equal work. Free, legal, safe contraception and abortion on demand, divorce at the request of one partner, with adequate state welfare for children.

• We stand for a working class women's movement that can fight, as an integral part of the labour movement, for workers' power. Only working class power and a planned economy can socialise domestic labour and release women from their centuries' old oppression.

• We fight for the liberation of lesbians and gays from the persecution and discrimination that is their lot under capitalism.

• We fight against the oppression and superexploitation, via the family, the state and at work, that is suffered by youth.

**New Leninist Trotskyist International**

The Irish Workers Group and its fraternal allies, Workers Power (Britain), Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany), Pouvoir Ouvrier (France) and Arbeiter Standpunkt (Austria) and our Latin American cothinkers are by no means yet parties capable of challenging Stalinism and social democracy for leadership across the whole range of working class struggles.

We are restricted by our size to arguing for our programme, our tactics and strategy with the most advanced workers and socialists, who still, by and large, give allegiance to either the reformist parties or, in some countries, the

various centrist or revolutionary nationalist organisations. But we seek at the same time the maximum involvement in the class struggle. We fight for our ideas whilst rendering the maximum assistance to workers and the oppressed in action.

As well as new revolutionary parties, the working class needs a new revolutionary International. The last, the *Fourth*, collapsed into centrism between 1948 and 1951 after it failed to re-elaborate Trotsky's programme for the new world period. It disintegrated organisationally in 1953. Only its degenerated fragments exist today. In Ireland these are the Peoples Democracy (USFI), Socialist Workers Movement (Cliffite), League for a Workers Republic (Lambertist) and Militant Tendency.

What is urgently needed is a democratic centralist international, based on the Marxist programme re-elaborated for today, to lead the fight to build mass revolutionary workers' parties in every country. This means the founding of a new Leninist-Trotskyist International.

**The M.R.C.I.**

IWG and its fraternal groups abroad have founded the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (MRCI), which will soon become an international democratic-centralist Tendency in the fight for revolutionary regroupment. On this basis we can and will take the next steps along the road to building national revolutionary parties and the international party, and thus towards the establishment of the world socialist order.

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Write or ask for information. Discuss our politics with us. We welcome you as a supporter and if possible a member. Support us in campaigns. Subscribe to our paper — make a donation — take a few copies to sell!

# support our struggle

For information write to  
IWG c/o 12 Langrishe Place Dublin 1

We fight to organise the unemployed alongside the employed, for full participation in the trade unions and an action programme to win the right to work for all.

We seek to build a rank and file movement beginning now with the militant minority, to win the regular election and recallability of all union officials and the fixing of their salaries at the average of their members' wages. The defence of all such norms of workers' democracy is indispensable in the struggle for a workers' state in order to guarantee against bureaucratic degeneration.

We fight to build a revolutionary alternative leadership in the unions as part of our fight to build a revolutionary party. Our goal is workers' power and nothing less.

# Thatcher's Class War in the North

SINCE ITS RE-ELECTION for a third term the Tory government has demonstrated its determination to continue its offensive against the living standards and quality of life of the working class, not just in Britain but in Northern Ireland.

In Britain one of Thatcher's goals is to reduce Labour controlled local bodies to the role of Victorian workhouse guardians and tax collectors. But local government in Northern Ireland has never offered any threat to Tory plans as it has in Britain - it is virtually powerless.

Likewise, because of the different set of economic and political problems facing the Tory administration here it has acted with greater latitude in its privatization programme. Thus the vast bulk of whatever remains of manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland is state-aided. Moreover it is the services sector, health, education and welfare, which now constitutes the bulk of all employment in Northern Ireland, not manufacturing industry. This is so because of the disastrous collapse of first the traditional industries and then, by the late seventies, the multinational fibre industries. The Six Counties remains the black hole of British capitalism. It has the highest unemployment, the highest cost of living, the lowest wages and the most appalling incidence of poverty in the U.K.

Nonetheless the Tories are determined to ensure that the full weight of their social legislation will fall just as savagely upon the North's poor. Indeed the fact that poverty is already so widespread in the Six Counties, that more individuals and families receive benefit than anywhere in the U.K., means that the Tory axe will fall sharper. Why?

The Tories have two main aims. First there are the financial savings they want to make. The second purpose is to further intensify divisions within the working class, by prioritizing and selecting among the ranks of the poor, the unemployed and the sick, the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor. In Northern Ireland the Tories have a head start because of the deep sectarian divisions creating ideal conditions for the Tories' divide and rule policies.

Their policy of deliberately creating unemployment has increased their social welfare expenditure. This runs in conflict with their aim of keeping a tight control on public spending. Their answer has been to cut the real value of benefits and change the rules so that fewer people are entitled to benefit.

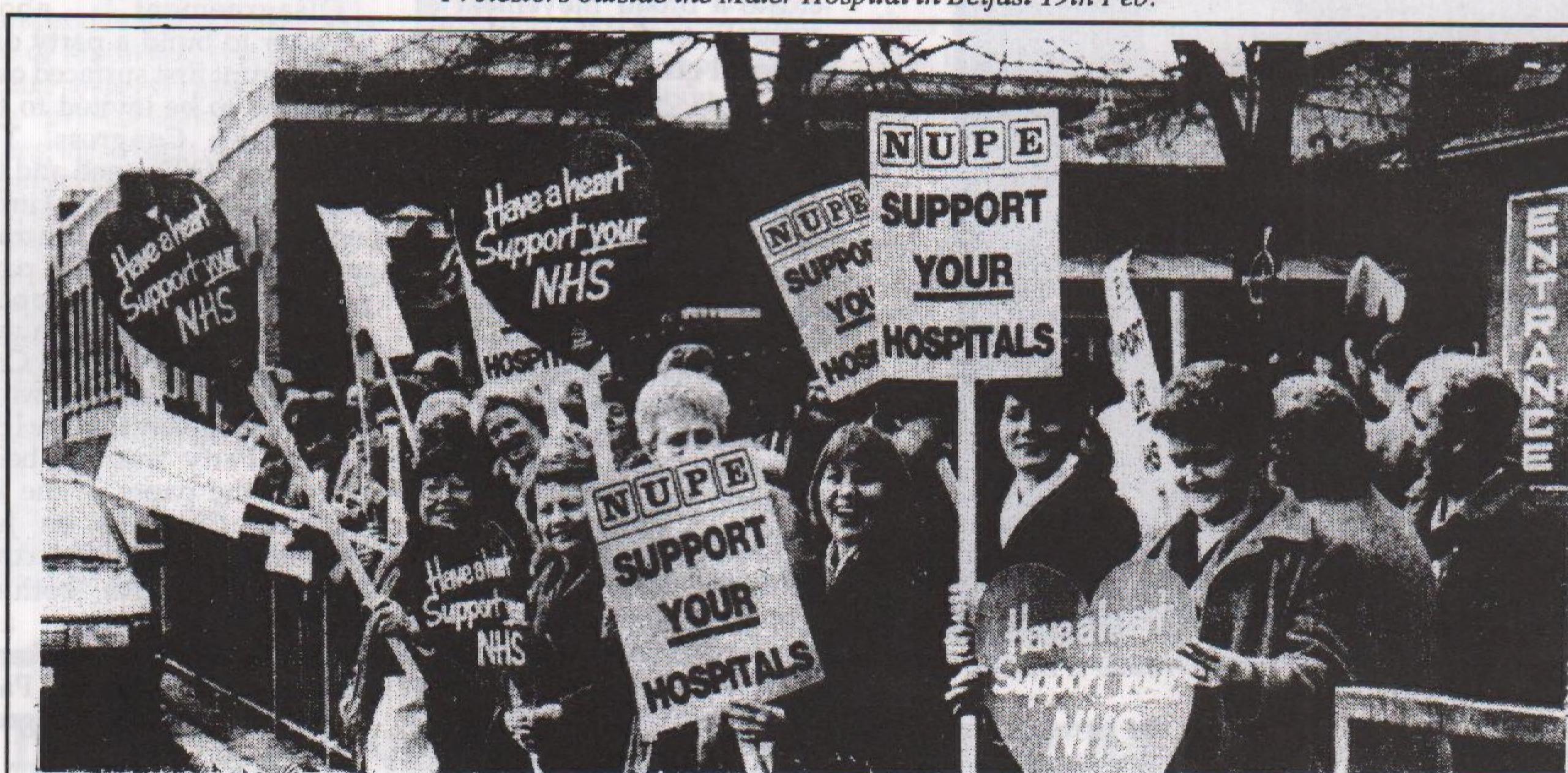
This is what Norman Fowler's Social Security Act, which is due to be implemented in April 1988, is all about. Eight million pounds is to be cut from supplementary benefit. Once-off grants for items such as beds, cookers or maternity clothes are to be replaced by loans from the "Social Fund" which they are expected to pay back over eighteen months. These measures are particularly savage cuts on the living stan-

dards of the many already at or near the bread line.

This "Social Fund" is perhaps the most obnoxious of the government's proposals. It abolishes the principle of statutory payments and the right to appeal against DHSS decisions. Instead, discretionary payments, loans, no right of appeal and strict cash limits for each area. The N.I. Office Minister, Needham, claims that the new Social Fund budget of £21 million will be higher than the current budget for once-off payments. In fact it is lower in total than before the Thatcherite cuts and now £13.7 million must be repaid by the recipients.

The long-term unemployed have been targeted for special attention. A new £1.5 billion scheme based on the merger of all existing programmes will come into effect. It is supposed to provide on-the-job training and education. It will pay no wages, just benefit plus a premium for taking part. It is almost certain that this scheme will be applied in full to Northern Ireland where more than half of the registered unemployed are long term. The 'Action for Community Employment' scheme already has more than 6,000 places. It will mean one step closer to U.S. style "welfare" instead of welfare, where eligibility for benefits is determined by willingness to work unpaid. With the out-door

Protestors outside the Mater Hospital in Belfast 19th Feb.



relief schemes of the '20s and '30s still in the memories of many families it will indeed be a return to the 'hungry thirties'.

Since 1980 the NHS hospitals have been cumulatively underfunded by £900 million, while in the same period private health spending has increased five times to stand at over £1 billion per year. The allocation of cash to the four Northern Ireland health boards shows a considerable shortfall below the level necessary even to keep up with increased demand.

The jobs of nurses, doctors and other staff are threatened as are ward closures. The Tory measures already

mean that free eye and dental check-ups are only available to children, pregnant and nursing women, the blind or partially sighted and those on the lowest incomes. This will inevitably mean fewer people availing of the service.

Underneath the rhetoric and humbug of "community-based health care, choice and democratic control" the proposals signal the further commercialization and privatization in the NHS. This will undermine national wage negotiations for health workers. For the low paid health workers this would be disastrous.

As well as the division between Protestant "state" schools and Catholic "maintained" schools, the Six-county education system has never escaped from the dark ages of eleven-plus selection, unlike Britain. Tory plans for education will intensify all of these features. They speak of the need for the curriculum to reflect an "enterprise culture", that is the world of business, industry and commerce. Knowledge is not to be valued for human development but on whether it is relevant to profit-

militancy in defence of their wages, conditions and services in the last number of years. But at every stage of their struggle the cowardly leaderships in the North and Britain have backed away from the all-out action that was necessary to win their demands.

The nationalist working class, by virtue of its sectarian exclusion from employment has been and remains heavily dependent upon the welfare services of the Northern state. It is an extremely vulnerable target for Tory policies, more so because of the support they give to Sinn Féin in elections. Sinn Féin have been outspoken in their condemnation of Tory policies from their inception.

They have repeatedly called for support for a campaign of resistance by the trade unions and community groups. But there it ends. The real test and challenge surely is for Sinn Féin with thousands of working class supporters to take the initiative in the workplaces and in the communities to build that resistance - with the trade union leaders if possible, without them and against them if necessary.

## All working class people will be hit by the attacks on education, health and services. We need a class-wide co-ordinated fightback.

making. The selection principle in Northern Ireland will only be strengthened, with the "opting out" clause. Parental choice will exist only for the wealthy minority, while the majority of children further languish in schools which are under-resourced and underprovided for, cramped in a straight-jacket of selection.

The class-wide nature of the Tory attacks could not be clearer. Workers who will be made redundant either through cutbacks or privatization measures will be further hit by benefit cuts. All working class people will be hit by the attacks on education, health and services. We need a class-wide co-ordinated fightback. Yet the response of the trade unions directly affected, COHSE, NUPE, NIPSA,

moreover Sinn Féin's pure nationalist perspective has strengthened its involvement in all kinds of community and voluntary action. These actions, however meritorious where they attempt to involve local people in some kind of control over their own lives, are no substitute for the urgent building of class-wide unity of all public sector workers alongside the communities that they serve.

A leading Sinn Féin councillor in Strabane, much heralded by *An Phoblacht / Republican News* recently as "a town getting off its knees" through the efforts of community initiative led by Sinn Féin, illustrated the Republican's confusion. He voted for rate increases along with

## Clinics Campaign Capitulates

AN APPEAL HEARING against the Hamilton Ruling, which bans non-directive pregnancy counselling, began in the Supreme Court last month. During the first week of the appeal the Defend the Clinics Campaign held a series of pickets outside the court. This was followed up by an activists conference on February 13th.

The conference acknowledged that numbers have declined and that activists are demoralised. Nevertheless, the alternative counselling service, set up in defiance of the ruling continues to exist, albeit on an erratic basis. A three page leaflet summarizing progress to date located the problem in the absence of a clear focus within the campaign. We might therefore have reasonably expected the conference to turn outwards in a new direction, in order to re-activate the fight.

Not so. In fact what the conference effectively did was to reaffirm and fluff-up its old strategies, despite the clear acknowledgement that they had failed abysmally! We say "effectively" because what the conference *actually* did was to avoid making any decisions. The chairperson refused to put motions to the vote or even to seek formal adoption of the campaign's own balance sheet and recommendations. By dismissing the vital business of voting as a "bureaucratic procedure which only bogs everybody down", the chairperson undemocratically imposed her own preference on the meeting.

Among the recommendations put forward (and not voted on) was the following: "That a group be set up to investigate if an alternative help line can be established if the present one comes under attack". This means that in the event of the present alternative service being injunctioned, the campaign's response will be to set up a new one, thereby avoiding the need to actively defend the injunctioned service. Yet when the IWG challenged this approach, we were told that decision on what to do in the event of an injunction would have to be left up to the individual counsellors. Certainly, this campaign isn't going to give them a lead or inspire them to fight such an injunction! The seeds of defeat have been sown in advance of the battle even taking place.

The task for militants now remains to campaign in the trade unions, student unions and communities to defend the existing service against injunction and to begin a struggle to repeal the Eight Amendment and the 1861 Act which make these injunctions possible.

THE LEAGUE OF COMMUNIST REPUBLICANS (LCR) based among anti-imperialist prisoners has recently published two issues of a new paper, *Congress 86*. In the first issue we find the following call:

"So what do we propose? We advocate the re-founding of the Republican Congress. The idea of course was excellent in its conception, its execution was the reason for its failure.... Many objections major and minor may be raised. ... But of greater significance and importance is to initiate a progress, small step by small step, whereby Ireland's only radical sectors can forge a proper liaison. ... Rebuild a new Republican Congress."

We believe that this call raises important questions of strategy and tactics for the Irish revolution on which we welcome open debate. This article, therefore, analyses the lessons of that unique movement of the Irish left, the Republican Congress of 1934. We believe them to be wrong in their call for a new congress. We argue in particular the danger of confusing the idea of a revolutionary vanguard Party with that of a United Front of different parties and organisations, however immediate and urgent it be to fight for both.

## WORLD IN CRISIS

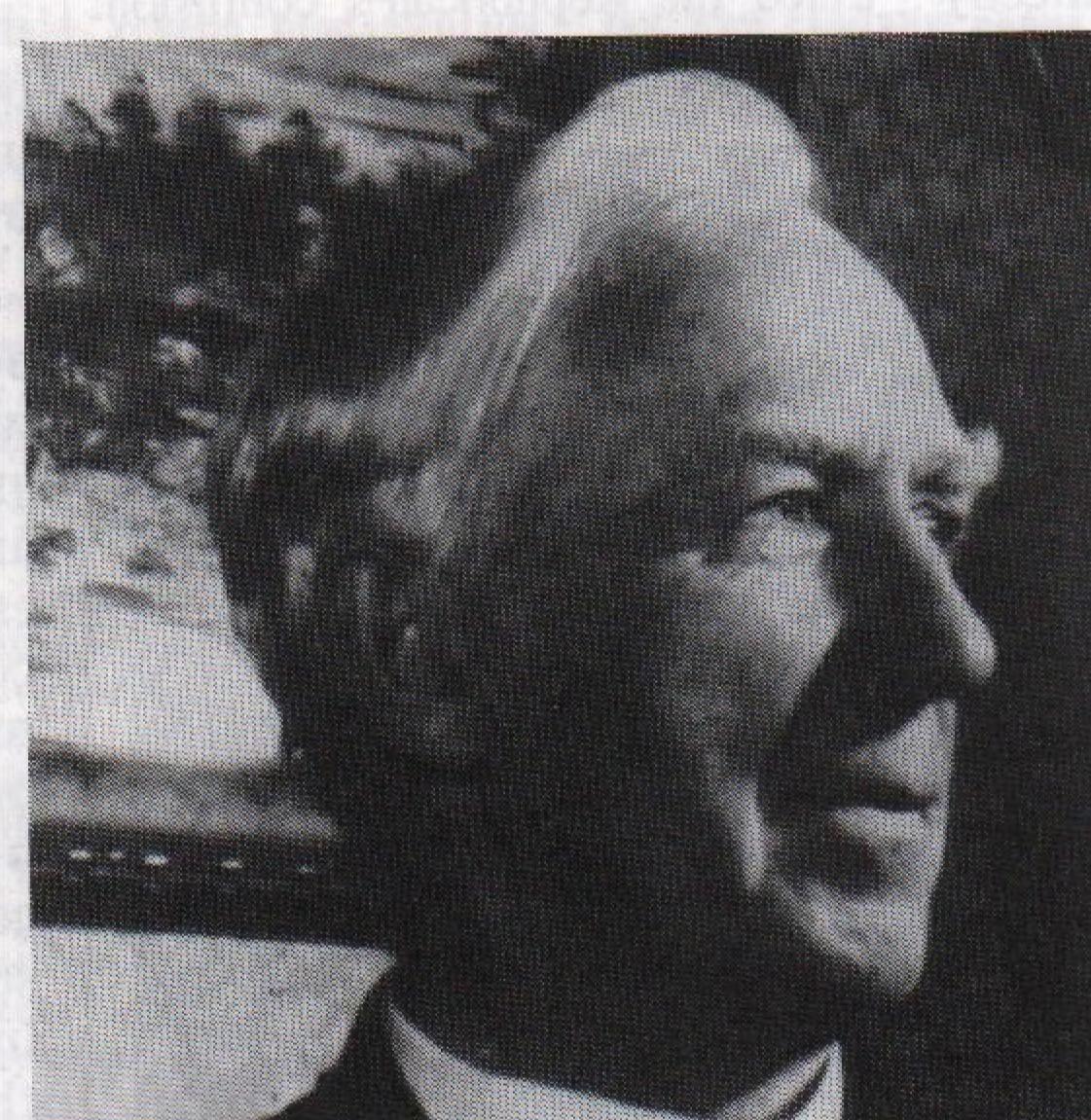
The capitalist world recovered for only a short period after the 1914-18 war before it again faced catastrophic slump. In attempting to crush the wave of workers' revolution that followed the war imperialist capitalism mobilised the dregs of society in fascist movements to smash the organisations of the working class and to resist the spread of Bolshevism.

Inside the USSR the Stalinist bureaucracy had destroyed the Bolshevik party by 1934. It replaced the fight for international communism with self-preservation of its own interests at the expense of workers' struggle abroad. Most tragically, it had so misguided the powerful German Communist Party that it suffered political extinction at the hands of the Fascists.

With that event ended the last hope of ever winning the Communist International back to the coherent revolutionary internationalist politics developed under Lenin and Trotsky from 1919-23. Instead the so-called communist parties world-wide, having floundered since 1924, rapidly lost all capacity to lead independent working-class struggle at the start of the '30s.

In Ireland, with the consolidation of Fianna Fáil as the largest pro-capitalist party from 1927, the IRA — still existing as an organised force of workers and small farmers — was wracked by class tensions. A new and radical political organisation was created with the support of many thousands of the IRA in 1931, *Saor Eire* [Free Ireland], but it was quickly suppressed along with most other left-wing organisations, by a massive witch-hunt by Church and State. While the 'mere-physical-force' faction in the IRA held the ring, communism and catholic reaction vied with each other in its ranks, even after DeValera replaced the openly pro-imperialist regime of Cosgrave.

DeValera was conveniently served by the IRA's illusions that he would re-instate them as the army of the Republic. But his tolerance of their street-action against the Irish fascists soon turned into a determination to disarm and demobilise them, and after 1935 to persecution and suppression worthy of the previous regime. Thus, alongside the class cleavage in the IRA there now loomed a growing division over whether Fianna Fáil could be relied upon to ever resume the struggle for complete unity and independence.



FOUNDING

O'Donnell, Gilmore and Ryan, along with some other prominent figures of the left, notably James Connolly's daughter Nora Connolly O'Brien and Michael Price, convened a conference of the breakaway group in Athlone on 7/8 April 1934. They issued a manifesto calling for a Congress to launch a combined anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle:

"We believe that a republic of a united Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots capitalism on its way. ... 'The lip-service paid to the Republic by leaderships that are tethered to Irish capitalism can therefore only confuse sincere Republicans and withhold them

from the struggle for freedom. ... This retreat from the Republic was not, unfortunately resisted by those organisations which could have rallied the people on the highground of the Republic. Had the IRA leadership understood that the economic war was not being fought to free Ireland but to serve Irish capitalism they would have carried out this mobilisation first before giving any support to that war. ...

"This mistake must now be remedied. A Congress of Republican opinion must now be assembled to make the Republic a main issue dominating the whole political field and to outline what are the forms of activity that move to its support." (Republican Congress 5/5/34 p.2).

It believed that the Republic when established would automatically be "a Republic of the workers and small farmers" by reason of the social forces that would achieve it. While it spoke of dismantling and rebuilding the Civil Service, however, it said nothing of breaking up the bedrock of the two states — their armies, police and coercive apparatus, nor of the need to expropriate capital other than the large ranchers.

## STRUGGLE

The Congress already represented significant forces in itself, organised in branches and committees of struggle of workers and small farmers. While declaring the need for a wider mass popular struggle for 'the Republic' — i.e. full unity and independence — it was already an embryonic party with a de facto programme of immediate struggle and the maximum goal of a *Workers' Republic*.

The Republican Congress movement drew in the veterans of Connolly's Irish Citizen Army including Roddy who, with Nora Connolly, played a central role in the movement's weekly paper *Republican Congress*. The paper was turned out in a very healthy way to

Congress, 6th Oct. 1934 p.2)

In fact, the Belfast Protestant members appeared at the republican commemoration of Wolfe Tone at Bodenstown on June 18th under the banners: *Shankill Road Belfast Branch. Break the Connection with Capitalism. Connolly's message our Ideal. On to the Workers' Republic*. They did not pretend to speak on behalf of the majority of Protestant workers but declared themselves to be the vanguard, committed to "break the connection with England and to smash Irish capitalism". The IRA leaders ordered that their 'communist banners' be torn down.

The "Irish Communist Party" (ICP), formalised only in 1933 as a centralised party with about 50 members, had no part in initiating the Republican Congress, but the success of this new movement compelled them to enter it. They did not write for the weekly *Republican Congress* paper but organised delegates from many front organisations with a view to packing the all-important Congress in September.

## SEPTEMBER

The primary goal of the movement was in fact to rally for this Congress. But what did they aim to achieve from it? Indeed what was it concretely possible to achieve through it?

O'Donnell, Gilmore and Ryan represented the majority force in the movement. For them the objective was to rally delegates from the IRA, from Fianna Fáil, from the Labour Party and Trade Unions to

create a broad movement of struggle to finally settle the national question.

At the same time O'Donnell envisaged the Republican Congress developing its own organisation more definitely as a working class political party committed to struggle against capitalism and bringing the mass of small farmers into alliance with the working class. The Connollyites grouping, around Roddy and Nora Connolly, particularly stressed this aspect.

The ICP was determined, however, that the Republican Congress should never become a political party. The ICP was founded as a hardened Stalinist nucleus committed to the defence of every twist and turn of the Kremlin's zig-zagging policies. It could not conceive of an open democratic fight on questions of programme and strategy which might win all the proletarian political forces in the Republican Congress movement into the beginnings of a genuine communist party.

The Stalinists did, however, argue for a "united front from below" against imperialism in which the working class would somehow bypass the leaderships of the IRA, Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party and would fight to complete the democratic programme of national unity and independence. Like O'Donnell's group,

# The Republican Congress of 1934



The Shankill Road contingent at the 1934 Wolfe Tone Commemoration.

struggle against the SOCIAL-FASCIST LABOUR PARTY AND TRADE UNION BUREAUCRACY, which has precisely the same slogan" (*The Irish Case for Communism, Cork Workers' Club*, p.24) [our emphasis]

It was correct to oppose the ICP's attempt at an *a priori* exclusion of the Labour and Trade Union leaderships, and even of Fianna Fáil. The key issue for communists was to make no concessions to the reformists of the Labour Party and ITUC, or to the bourgeois nationalists of Fianna Fáil who were engaged in a deceptive posture of conflict with British imperialism.

The decisive need was to define the necessary demands and actions of an anti-imperialist front which would in no way accommodate treachery by the reformists or constitutional republicans. Secondly they needed to cede not a whit of the freedom of action or speech of communists or workers to them. And thirdly, they had to be willing to openly break with and denounce any or all of them once they moved to betray the struggles of the united front.

## THE RATHMINES CONFERENCE

As things turned out, Labour, the union leaders and Fianna Fáil used their repeated baiting by the ICP as species of 'fascists' as a welcome excuse to evade the Republican Congress's call for mass united action against imperialism. The IRA then followed suit.

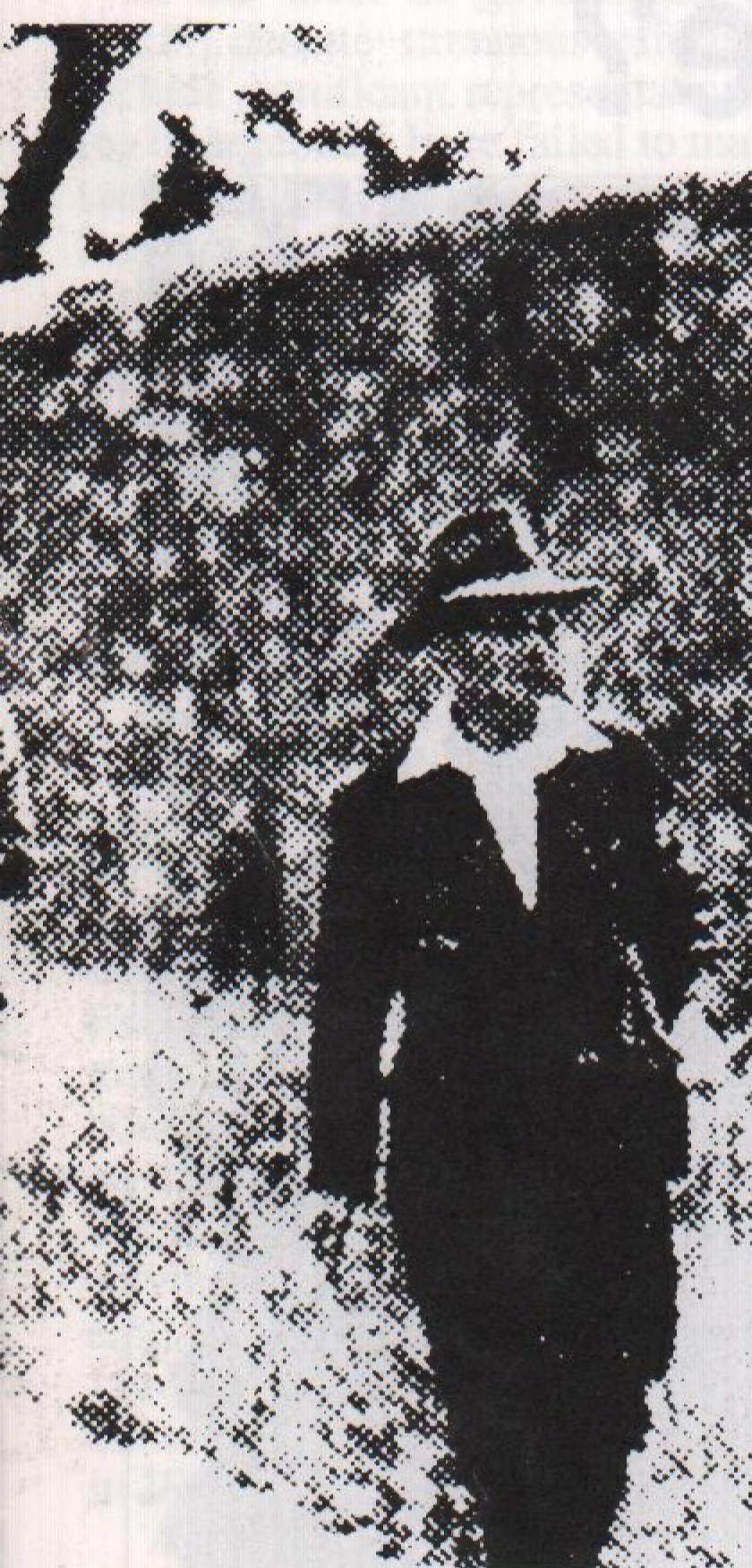
The Rathmines Conference drew 186 exclusively left-wing activists, some from a Republican, some from a socialist or trade union background. The dominant groupings were the left Republicans (O'Donnell), the Connollyites and the Sta-

wards the struggles of workers — Protestant and Catholic, Republican prisoners, anti-fascist fighters, the unemployed, and the struggles of small farmers.

Nora Connolly described their political work: 'One of the greatest things we have done in working for this congress is that we have won to the movement many sections in the North that had been hostile and had kept away from the Republican and National movements [SHE IS REFERRING TO SECTIONS OF PROTESTANT WORKERS - IWG]. The reason for that was that in the Athlone call and week in week out in our propaganda we showed that the type of Republic we were fighting for was a Workers' Republic' (Republican

# Republican

## of 1934



linists led by Seán Murray.

There were two major questions. The first was whether the strategic goal of the Irish Revolution should be defined as 'the Republic' or the Workers' Republic. The second was whether to found a new revolutionary workers' party. On both issues the conference was polarised and ultimately split.

The Rathmines Congress could potentially have defined the basis for an anti-imperialist United Front and begun the fight for it. But given the nature of the attendance it also represented a clear opportunity to create the elements of a cadre organisation and programme for a new revolutionary workers' party which would fight for the united front as part of a revolutionary communist programme.

The ICP was determined to block any decision to build a party, but on the other hand the Connollyites failed to distinguish the two tasks, party and united front, and fell foul

In its recent journal the centrist League for a Workers' Republic examines the history of the Republican Congress. Its conclusions, however, are merely an apology for the LWR's own stageism.

It argues that the Congress could not have "set up" an anti-imperialist United Front. This reflects the actual practice of the LWR which refuses to openly argue for united front tactics until such time as they can themselves preside over large forces. The Comintern under Lenin and Trotsky, however, urged even the smallest communist parties to apply united front tactics!

The LWR goes on to argue that the Republican Congress

of the Stalinists in the first debate. The disastrous outcome was guaranteed by the wavering of the left Republicans, for O'Donnell had hoped to build both a party and a wider front against imperialism but he was persuaded by the Stalinists to abandon the idea of a party on the eve of the Rathmines meeting.

Leninists and Trotskyists hold that the anti-imperialist united front aims to smash the armed control of the imperialists and their agents and institute the most thoroughgoing democratic measures for self-determination which leave open the question of which class will rule within the nation. Therefore, a proletarian party cannot bind itself to the slogan of the bourgeois Republic as the goal of an anti-imperialist united front. Nor would it serve any purpose to impose the slogan of the Workers' Republic on a front embracing revolutionary nationalists.

A united front cannot be envisaged as an ongoing bloc with other parties or a half way house to a new party. It is fought for by revolutionary communists only for limited concrete goals of struggle, for practical resistance to repression up to and including insurrectionary general strike, to drive out imperialist forces.

### LEFT REPUBLICANS

While O'Donnell and his colleagues had been forced to break with the organisation of the IRA to found the Republican Congress their strategic perspective was still a left variant of republicanism — of national independence first as the pre-condition of then going on to fight for the emancipation of labour. The core of O'Donnell's argument was:

*"We dare not jump through a stage in the fight raising now the slogan 'Workers Republic', and leaving Fianna Fáil to escape, saying that they are standing for one kind of Republic, and that we stand for a different one."* (R.C., 6th Oct., p.2)

Thus O'Donnell was arguing for a diplomatic use of 'The Republic' as a slogan for unity

with Fianna Fáil, agreeing to go along with FF's idea of a bourgeois social order but concealing the ultimate aim of imposing a proletarian social order.

History has tragically shown that such a method holds back the proletariat from any conflict with capitalism during the fight against imperialism, and leads to a reconstruction of a new bourgeois ruling class in the post colonial society on the backs of the workers who have fought to drive out the imperialists.

The massacre of the Chinese workers by the Kuomintang bourgeois nationalists in 1927 was the sharpest example of this opportunist political subordination to the bourgeoisie. This form of opportunism towards the bourgeoisie was developed as a general method by Stalin in 1935-6 in France and Spain under the name of the Popular Front.

But the left Republican perspective was more complex than this. It was rooted in organisations of struggle which made it on the surface much more attractive. O'Donnell argued at the Rathmines Congress:

*"The way to build is to create committees of workers and small farmers to conduct working class and small farmer struggles, and to express the political aspirations of these growing forces in increased and urgent campaigns to achieve the Republic. In this way Irish capitalism will be exposed, and ever-growing power will rest in our committees of workers and small farmers. A republic achieved that way becomes a workers and small farmers republic because the organs of struggle become the organs of Government, to express the will of those who were the driving force for victory."*

Such struggles would in fact be held back by a front which undertook to limit all actions to the pursuit first of the bourgeois Republic. O'Donnell thus grossly underestimated of the centrality of a revolutionary party with a programme of open struggle against capitalism at all points. It was the other side of his serious underestimation of the difficulty of smashing the capitalist state.

### LENIN

His notion of a 'workers and small farmers state' arising inevitably from the spontaneous mass action of the masses in the democratic struggle was one repeatedly used by Stalinism to excuse the sell-out of working class political independence. In China in

the twenties, in Spain in the civil war, Stalinism claimed to be applying Lenin's slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.

In reality, however, Lenin dropped this slogan after February 1917, not because it had been already achieved, not because this "stage" had been passed, but because it could not be achieved! The peasantry had not been won over by the working class and the working class had not been installed in power and could not be as long as they limited their struggle to a democratic stage.

Lenin recognised in 1917, as Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution* had argued since 1906, that the bourgeoisie could only be kept from power, and the peasants' needs fulfilled, by a revolution against the bourgeoisie under the slogan of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, with the support of the peasantry, i.e. the Workers' Republic. The so-called 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' was thus abandoned by the Bolsheviks as a cul-de-sac and an unattainable idea, not as a stage already exhausted.

### THE STALINISTS

The Stalinists of the ICP rowed in behind O'Donnell's stageism and against the Connollyites. Their core argument was put by their Moscow-trained General Secretary Seán Murray:

*"I would state the position to be the very opposite of what Michael Price [a CONNOLLYITE] says. He says you cannot get rid of British imperialism until you smash capitalism. I say you cannot smash capitalism until you get rid of British imperialism. Therefore, let Congress address itself to the task of fighting for the leadership of the great masses of the Irish people who are fighting for national independence."* (R.C. 13th Oct 1934, p.2)

Although the Stalinists were out to confine the Republican Congress to the role of a revolutionary nationalist front, their arguments made it clear that the propaganda of communists in such a front would not go beyond arguing the democratic programme. Only the arguments of Price and Connolly in any way defended the strategic interests of the working class. Sadly, however, they fought for their line without arguing how the limited platform of an action-front should be distinguished from this strategic working class programme.

Continued on page 6

## "RECONVENE THE REPUBLICAN CONGRESS?"

It is clear from its history that the slogan to "Reconvene the Republican Congress" can mean very different things to different groups. If Congress '86 are using it to argue for some kind of mass anti-imperialist united front, centred on workers and the poor, it would be better to say so directly. The danger of trying to popularise this under the slogan to reconvene the Republican Congress is not only confusion but abstractness. Proposals for united front action must be, of all things, concrete.

For example the LCR could practically advance the united front call by throwing their weight and prestige behind the fight to put working class action at the centre of mobilising all anti-imperialist forces against repression.

The fudged nature of the Congress '86 call is seen in how it comes across to Long Kesh prisoner, Tommy McKearney, in a letter to *The Leninist* (No. 58):

*"a new Congress would/could not, initially anyway, be a unified party.... within Republican Congress type work lies the best hope of developing and building a genuine workers' vanguard under present conditions in Ireland."*

*"Nor is this necessarily a putting of priorities about face; that is, calling for a Popular Front before a solid vanguard exists.... conditions must be created which allow for the emergence of a strong party".*

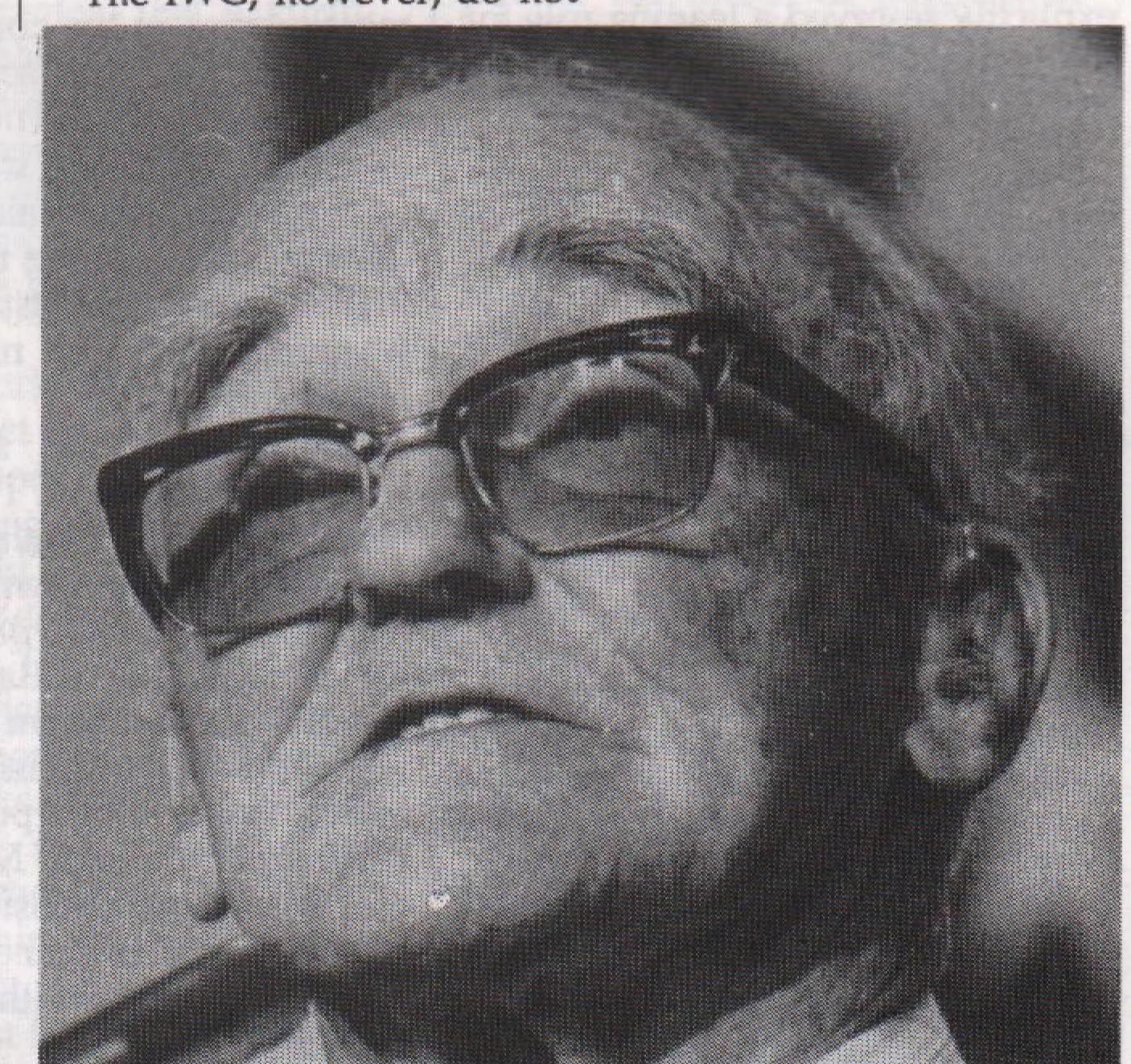
*(The writer perhaps is using POPULAR FRONT loosely to mean a UNITED FRONT with a popular following.)*

The IWG, however, do not

believe that any united front, no matter how massive or militant, can grow over spontaneously into communist revolution. Only the intervention of a Leninist-Trotskyist party can bring about the downfall of the system of capitalist imperialism by winning the leadership of the toiling masses mobilised in various united fronts, and in soviets — the highest form of workers' united front.

Nor will any united front create the necessary conditions for the fusion of radical elements into the nucleus of the kind of party that is needed. To create that party demands two things in the present circumstances. One is to fight to establish its programmatic basis in the only unfalsified tradition of revolutionary communism — the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky. The other is to engage in the class struggle with a concrete action programme that links immediate tasks to the perspective working class power.

But the first question must be that of programme — what tradition, strategy, perspectives and tactics. Until Congress '86 confronts this in open discussion and debate, nothing solid can be gained from fudged appeals to inspiring but ultimately failed historical experiences. The Republican Congress's legacy of confusion, in the case of the LCR, actually disguises their failure to speak clearly, as communists must, however small our forces, to the immediate needs of the struggles of anti-imperialists, workers, women, youth, the unemployed and all oppressed.



Roddy Connolly at the 1978 Labour Party conference which he chaired during the coalition with Fine Gael.

PHOTO: DEREK SPEIRS / REPORT

## LWR - RENDERING CONFUSION MORE PROFOUND

could and should have set up "a large Workers' Republican party", but that the key point of its fighting programme should have been "the unconditional demand for a Republic whatever its social content" (WR 122 p.11). Hence, they argue, Roddy Connolly was wrong to argue for the Workers' Republic as the strategy for the Irish Revolution as against 'The Republic'.

They claim that the early, revolutionary Comintern supported this travesty of Lenin and Trotsky, but in fact their quotation explicitly argues

that the struggle be waged on the working class programme of social revolution against capitalism (i.e. for the Workers' Republic). They cite the Comintern resolution: "To win success the masses must be mobilised against the Free State, and this can only be done on the basis of the social programme of the Communist Party of Ireland. [THE HEALTHY PRE-1923 PARTY OF WHICH R. CONNOLLY WAS LEADER - CS]... Long Live the Irish national struggle for independence! Long Live the Workers' Republic of Ireland!"

It is elementary for the Inter-

national to give unconditional support to national struggles against imperialism even when led by bourgeois forces; but within the colonial country, communists do not give unconditional support to the slogan of the bourgeois Republic. That would mean relegating the class struggle as soon as the nationalists demanded this as a condition of forming the united front to struggle for that 'Republic'!

Whatever LWR's private aspiration for the Workers' Republic, the politics they have argued down the years actu-

ally limits the revolutionary action of the working class struggle to achieving the democratic programme: e.g.

*"The only way forward is the complete re-organisation of the economy of the 32 Counties in the interests of the Irish people. ... This can only be done by a fully sovereign independent government of a united 32-County Ireland, after the driving out of the British forces and the dismantling of the collaborationist institutions linked to Leinster House"* (WR 95)

LWR suggests the Republican Congress should have

formed a new party, but not a revolutionary communist one, despite their mention of Trotsky's struggle for precisely that. LWR's obsessive search for the half-way-house party flows from the fetish that the process of history in itself must inevitably make it a revolutionary party! They boasted:

*"The LWR has been campaigning for a 32-County Workers' Party for over 5 years. Such a party would be committed to Irish unity, we said, and to the independent representation of the working class as a class. It would not claim to be a revolutionary Party".* (WR No. 116, p.10)

For any doubters that should be the complete proof of their abandonment of Lenin and Trotsky!

The Republican Congress of 1934 continued from page 5

#### THE WORKERS' REPUBLIC

The Connollyites fought at Rathmines to commit the conference to the strategic goal of a Workers Republic supported by small farmers and the poor. Roddy Connolly's argument was reported as follows:

*'It went down to the question of what was the best method of developing the thoughts and outlook and efforts of those who would come into the Congress—... the slogan of the Workers' Republic ... dated from 1896 when it was advanced by the Irish Socialist Republican Party founded by James Connolly. It brought out the greatest force, intensity, passion and enthusiasm of the Irish working class. It was something the workers, small farmers and agricultural labourers thoroughly understood. It would weld that trinity together and help make them invincible in the leadership of the struggle against capitalism' (R.C., 6th Oct 1934, p.2).*

The failure to explicitly distinguish Party and United Front was already latent in James Connolly's legacy. He had wrongly identified the class struggle with the national struggle, instead of distinguishing and linking them. Now his followers failed to distinguish the organisational forms for combining them — party and united front. Roddy Connolly's presentation of the united front appears not to recognise the non-working class character of many of the forces alongside whom a struggle against imperialism would initially have to be waged:

*'He wanted a fight with allies in the trade union movement, in the labour movement and the small farmers. They could not securely build united front committees in the country or with the trade unionists or anywhere unless they approached the question from the standpoint of the Workers' Republic. R.C. 13th Oct p.4)*

#### "Through the Republic"

But whereas the Connolly perspective saw all the potentially anti-imperialist forces as essentially proletarian, Stalinist stageism (as in China) explicitly reserved a leading role for the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie in the anti-imperialist struggle.

Given the alliance of left nationalists and Stalinists at Rathmines in favour of stageism and against defining the strategic goal of the revolution as the Workers' Republic it is surprising that the vote was so close — 99 to 84. But the upshot was that the Connollyites had suffered a major programmatic defeat.

Having lost this battle they saw little point in fighting for their second main motion which was to build a new Workers' Republic Party. They withdrew it. Some walked out of the conference, including Price and Nora Connolly. Others stayed, only to lose interest in the Congress as it decayed, first into a left nationalist rump and then into a periphery of the ICP.

The weekly paper had previously carried the slogan "organ of the committees of workers and small farmers working for the united front against fascism and for the Irish Workers' Republic", but afterwards it reflected the victory of 'labour must wait' stageism — "organ of the united front of Republican and working class forces against imperialism and fascism and through the Irish Republic to the Workers' Republic".

The ICP had lined up with O'Donnell's stageism at Rathmines in the belief that having blocked the formation of a party the Republican Congress stood a good chance of being handled as an ICP periphery and source of recruits. Its working class support fell away and left it in financial crisis, putting an end to the paper from 5th Jan 1935 to 30th March when it reappeared as a dispirited left-nationalist monthly. It ended up as a transparent front for the Stalinist ICP. ■

After eight years in Afghanistan, the USSR has suddenly announced a pull-out to begin on May 15th, on the sole condition that the imperialist powers promise not to intervene or give further military aid to the anti-Kabul forces.

The Afghan left which has weathered a civil war with feudal reactionaries for ten years, rightly fears that Gorbachev may be abandoning them in a lion's den in the utopian hope of lessening imperialist antagonism towards the Soviet Union itself. Pakistani dictator, Zia Ul Haq, and the hydra-headed guerrilla movement are determined to have the majority and all the key posts in an "interim government" to which Gorbachev is prepared to hand over power. So why did the USSR ever go into Afghanistan? And how is the reactionary restoration to be resisted?

The immediate reason for the Soviet invasion was the likely collapse of the Afghan government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). It had come to power in 1978 committed to a programme of democratic reforms such as land reform and women's literacy rights. Its seizure of power foiled the plans of the Shah of Iran and the CIA to pull Afghanistan into the camp of western imperialism. The PDPA regime pursued a pro-Soviet foreign policy and strengthened economic relations with the USSR.

By late 1979 the base of the PDPA had been severely weakened. Its base had traditionally been amongst state administrators, teachers and army officers committed to a modernized and more democratic Afghanistan. This made it extremely difficult for it to push through its reform programme in the countryside. Attempts to do so invariably fanned the flames of Islamic reaction.

The PDPA's own 'top down' bureaucratic approach to the reform programme did little to pacify the reactionaries in the countryside and the regime was soon faced with a civil war. Its writ often did not run beyond the major towns and transport lines. Imperialism openly aided the reactionary forces hoping to destroy the PDPA regime and establish a pro-western, anti-Soviet regime in Afghanistan.

Internal factional strife further weakened the PDPA. The more rural based, *Pushtun Khalqi* faction of Amin openly feuded with the preponderantly urban *Dari* speaking *Parcham* faction of Babrak Karmal. As head of government in 1979 Amin was committed to an increased use of repression in order to push the reform programme through. Meting out repression against opposition inside the PDPA, Amin further narrowed the base of the regime within the Afghan civil war.

The Soviet Armed Forces (SAF) intervened in December 1979. They executed Amin and his closest associates who were now discovered to have been imperialist agents! The *Parchamite* Karmal was installed in office as Moscow's favourite son. His job was to defuse the civil war crisis by dampening down the pace of the reforms that were provoking reactionary resistance. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was to back him in this endeavour.

#### CONTRADICTORY CHARACTER

The Soviet invasion of 1979 had a profoundly contradictory character. The Kremlin bureaucracy intervened in order to defend their own security interests against imperialist backed reaction in the Afghan Civil War. The

#### INTERNATIONAL

# Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan

## What's at Stake?



A women's literacy class - now threatened by concessions to the mosque

Soviet bureaucracy did not wish to see the PDPA regime replaced by one that would turn Afghanistan into an imperialist base for observation and listening posts right on the border of Soviet Central Asia. They were also worried that an imperialist backed Islamic client state would bring intolerable pressure to bear on the Asian Soviet Republics. To that extent they had to forestall a victory of the reactionary forces.

However, the deeply conservative Soviet bureaucracy had no use for the reform policies of the 'Afghan revolution'. Those policies were serving to endanger its own security in having provoked reactionary opposition and opened a door to imperialist influence over the opposition forces. From 1979 until today the SAF have attempted to undo even the most modest measures of the reform programme of the PDPA. This highlights the absurdity of the claims by those, like the Spartacists and sections of the Stalinist movement, that the Soviet army were invading as defenders of the 'Afghan revolution' and should be hailed. The Soviet bureaucracy invaded Afghanistan for its own reactionary purposes. For this reason it was necessary for revolutionaries to make clear their opposition to that invasion. However, once the USSR was inside Afghanistan the question was, would the withdrawal of the SAF aid or hinder the struggle for victory over reaction in the civil war?

Thanks to the stupidity of the Kremlin and the bureaucracy of the PDPA the forces of progress on their own could not, and still yet cannot, defeat the reactionary rebels. For this reason, and notwithstanding our opposition to the invasion, we have consistently argued against the call for an immediate and total withdrawal of the SAF.

The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan served to physically defend the

progressive forces in Afghan society, grouped around the PDPA, from destruction at the hands of reaction. However, the military and security apparatus of the USSR and its most loyal Afghan agents were also deployed to destroy any independent initiative by any section of those progressive forces on behalf of their own democratic reform programme.

Karmal was instructed to back-pedal on all of the PDPA's reforms. Land ownership limits were raised. In reality the land reform programme had already been hampered by an absence of material and physical support to the rural poor to exercise their new rights. Under Karmal the larger landowners were to be under less challenge.

#### RECONCILIATION

The regime searched desperately for a reconciliation with the Islamic clergy, the mosque. The women's literacy campaign, which so outraged Islamic reaction, was increasingly restricted to the urban areas. At the same time Soviet and PDPA representatives tried to lure King Mohammad Zahir Shah back from his Italian exile to head the government. The overall direction of Soviet policy was to attempt to cobble together an agreement with the tribal chiefs, the mosque and the monarchy that would protect the Soviet bureaucracy's security interests.

As it became clear that the Soviet Armed Forces and the PDPA Afghan Army were unable to secure a rapid military victory (imperialist backing for the rebels saw to that) Soviet tactics towards the opposition changed. Where possible they made their own private deals with the oppositional and tribal chiefs to leave them alone in return for a military truce. In 1983 they made a cease-fire treaty with Ahmad Shah Massud—the 'Lion of

the Panjshir'. Such deals recognized the rights of the particular chief to determine the political and social practices in their given zone and further diminished the PDPA's authority. In the case of Massud the deal gave the opposition a breathing space within which it was able to reorganize and regroup. The truce with Massud broke down in 1984.

Where such tactics failed the SAF were prepared to devastate whole areas. Local populations were faced with the choice of submission or of joining the mass exodus from the countryside into the cities, or to exile in Pakistan or Iran. Approximately four million refugees have left Afghanistan in the last 8 years. The population of the capital city, Kabul, has swollen four-fold to two million.

Yet these methods failed to stem the activities of the opposition forces. The western media is ever ready to broadcast stories by dewy-eyed journalists like the aptly named Sandy Gall about how the fine, upstanding, freedom loving Afghan rebels are opposing communist aggression. In reality the opposition is deeply reactionary and extremely barbaric. It is riven not only by tribal and national rivalries but also by a division between Islamic fundamentalists and monarchists. In no sense is it a coherent nationalist movement. In no sense are its goals those of real national liberation.

The Islamic fundamentalists are to be found in such groups as *Jamiat-i-Islami* and the Islamic Alliance for the Liberation of Afghanistan. They favour the creation of an Islamic Republic where the mosque would rule and where women will not only have their hopes of literacy dashed but also where *purdah* (the ritualized separation of women from men) would be re-introduced. They fight the PDPA as the enemies of Islam and the agents of Satan. [contd. Page 7]

## INTERNATIONAL

IN JULY 1979 the Sandinistas (FSLN) led the mass movement which overthrew the U.S. backed dictator Somoza. Initially sections of the bourgeoisie had supported the Sandinistas because of the personal corruption of Somoza and his accumulation of a large proportion of the country's resources. The history of Nicaragua since has been dominated by the impossibility of maintaining that alliance.

At the level of government the FSLN, despite strenuous efforts to include significant representation of the bourgeoisie, have failed to maintain the alliance forged to get rid of Somoza. April 1980 saw the departure from the governing junta of Violetta Barrios de Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo, who was later to become a leading contra. Their bourgeois replacements lasted only a little longer, with Arturo Cruz leaving the junta in 1981 and joining the Contras sometime later.

This failure to maintain the Popular Front at the level of government did not, however, mean that the strategy of maintaining an alliance with Nicaragua's capitalists was abandoned by the Sandinista leadership. Far from it, they were determined to maintain it despite the refusal of the bourgeoisie and the Church leaders to co-operate. In practice maintaining the multi-class alliance meant preserving and encouraging private agriculture and industry. Comandante Jaimie Wheelock, Minister for Agriculture, put it in its most utopian form in 1984:

*'Let the bourgeoisie just produce and limit itself, as a class, to a productive role. Let it use its means of production to live, not as an instru-*

Resistance forces in the Shi'ite Hazara region have had increased support from Iran. They too are committed to an Islamic Republic but one likely to be at odds with that favoured by the rest of the predominantly Sunni Afghan Islamic fundamentalists.

The other major axis in the opposition is comprised of a collection of monarchist groups. These are more openly favourable to western imperialism. They favour never allowing a communist party to exist in Afghanistan and are tied to the old traditional ruling class of the country.

Intensely divided, the opposition was and remains incapable of military victory, even less of a unified political solution. To the extent that they advance political solutions they are all variants of a reactionary drive to block those who want to modernize and democratize Afghanistan. They wish to wipe away every trace of a secular Afghan state that tries, in however limited and bureaucratic way, to break with the backwardness and oppression of the past, particularly as far as women are concerned.

However, the scale of military and financial backing for the rebels allows them to cause continued military headaches for the SAF. The US has spent over \$1 billion in military aid. The *Washington Post* has reported that in 1985 alone the US Congress allocated \$250 million to the Afghan contras. Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan are all backing various resistance groups. So too does China. That the Afghan fundamentalists were passing on Stingers to Iran shows both how well armed they are and also the all-pervasive freebooting in their ranks.

It is little wonder then that Babrak Karmal's regime failed to restore order despite the presence of Soviet troops. Increasingly the urban and gas and oil producing areas have

# Nicaragua Nine Years On

*ment of power or domination.'*

Of course there was never any question that the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie or any other capitalist class, would voluntarily give up its political power, its direct control of the state, while a 'painless' transition to socialism was adopted. At best a minority offered grudging, if obstructive co-operation. The majority set about sabotaging the economy, decapitalizing the plants and organising, with the help of their North American friends, the counter-revolution.

What we have seen in Nicaragua in the first eight and a half years is living proof that tying the workers' and peasants' struggle to a 'democratic stage' sows the seeds of bloody defeat for the masses. This can be seen most clearly in the agricultural policy adopted by the Sandinistas.

The growing of cotton, coffee and to a lesser extent, cattle raising were crucial to the primarily agricultural Nicaraguan economy. While Somoza's considerable lands were expropriated (amounting to 20% of Nicaragua's agricultural land), peasant land occupations of other farms were discouraged and reversed by the new government. Capitalist farmers were given even more handouts than under Somoza, money sorely needed to reconstruct the country after the devastation of the war.

The first Agrarian Law Reform was delayed until August 1981 in order not to alienate the bourgeois members of the government. When finally enacted the 1981 Reform was

extremely moderate and did little to assuage the land hunger of the peasants. It was only in 1985 with an escalating Contra war and real signs of disaffection amongst the small and landless peasants that a slightly more radical land reform was introduced. Even today the president of the National Farmers' and Stockmen's Union, (SNAG), a union of small and medium farmers which is increasingly a major social base of the FSLN regime, can declare:

*'I would say that the agrarian law to date has been very prudent... you might even say conservative. The new law is also consistent with the mixed economy and political pluralism.'*

In so criticizing the Sandinistas we do not ignore the real gains of the 1979 revolution, the freedom from the constant repression and violence of the Somoza dictatorship, the right to vote and to join trade unions, the gains in health care and in education—in particular the literacy campaigns—and the improvements in housing and sanitation. Yet the economic blockade imposed by the USA, the massive human and financial costs of the US-backed contra war, the sabotage and obstruction of the bourgeoisie and the undoubtedly corrupting effect of a massive black market and 'informal economy' is increasingly undermining many of these gains.

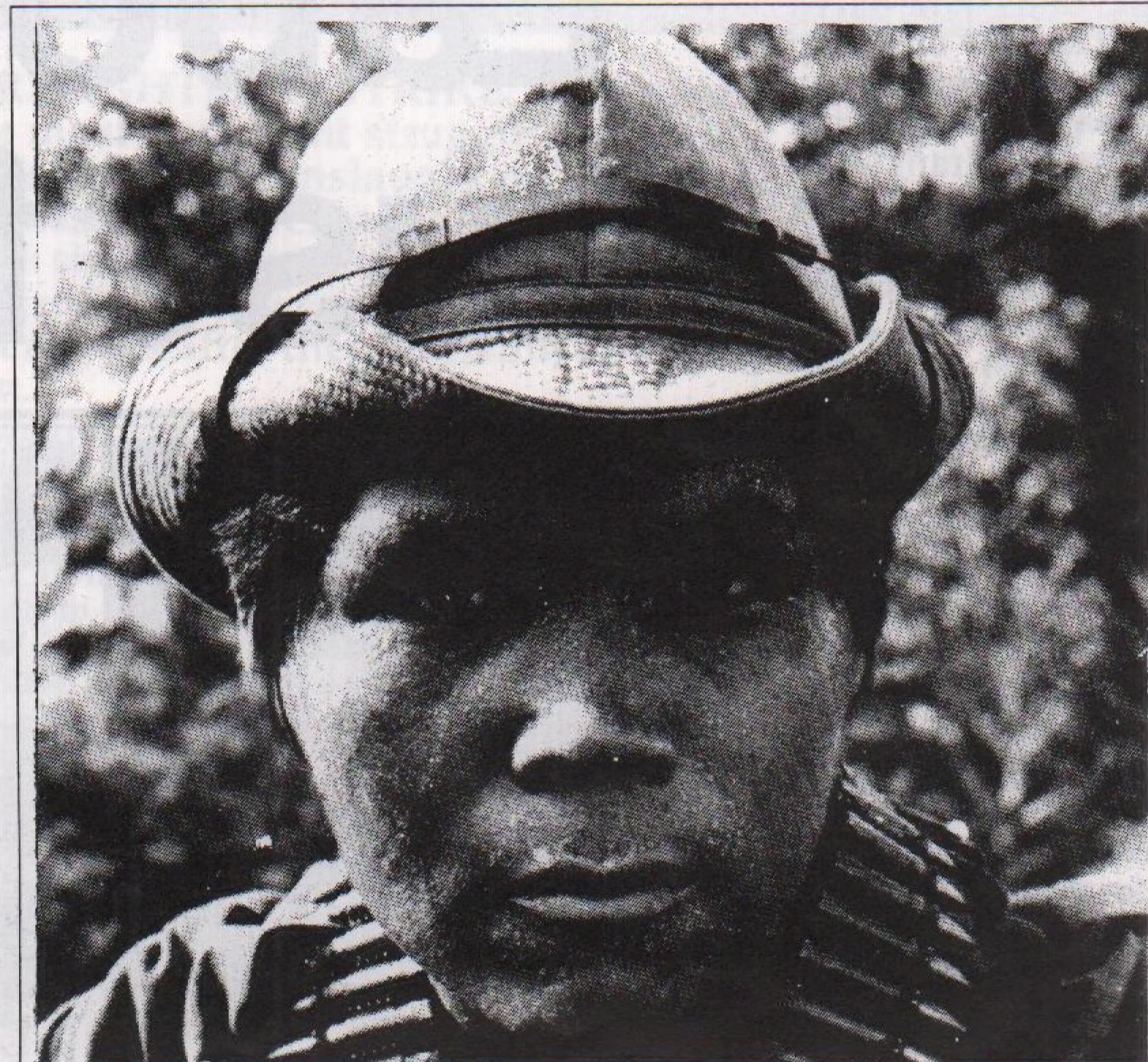
Between March 1982 and January this year, various 'states of emergency' have outlawed the right to strike for all but a few months during

the elections. Real wages in Nicaragua now stand at only 57% of their 1980 value—signalling a real fall in living standards of the masses. There has been a considerable exodus from the factories and into the 'informal economy' which now accounts for 49% of the economically active population. The war takes up over 50% of the governmental expenditure and most education and housing programmes are at a standstill.

Nine years on it is increasingly clear that the Sandinistas have gone

down a futile and dangerous path of courting the bourgeoisie. They have effectively allowed the bourgeoisie to veto all measures directed towards beginning the socialist organisation of society or any forms of mass democracy, even while the bourgeoisie organizes a war to overthrow the revolution!

The complete failure of Ortega's most recent compromises to try to show the U.S. congress how moderate he is, brings home the iron necessity of constructing a revolutionary party armed with the perspective of permanent revolution, the only possibility of a real and lasting victory over imperialism.



## FORCES OF PROGRESS

All this shows that Najibullah's Soviet advisers would desperately like to strike a deal with reaction that would enable it to end the occupation. They want guarantees that Afghanistan will not become an anti-Soviet base. And in return they would ditch the reform programme completely and even leave many of the PDPA's 150,000 members to face the 'wrath of Allah' at the hands of the blood-thirsty rebels.

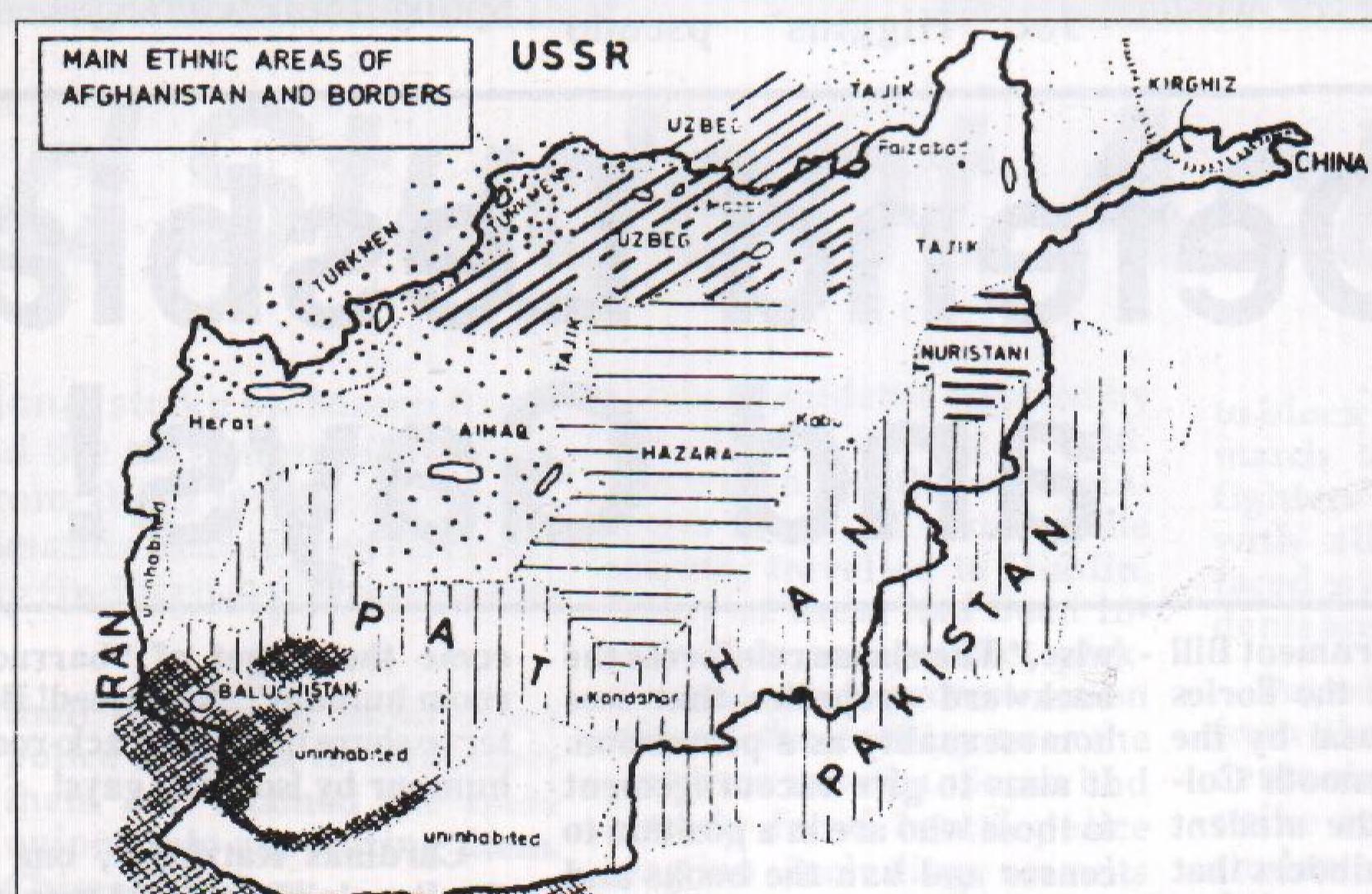
At present world imperialism is not that willing to let the Soviet bureaucracy off the hook. The deal Gorbachev is seeking may well continue to elude him. But for those behind the Soviet lines the danger signals are all too clear to see. They may well prove the ultimate victims of the Soviet Union's reactionary policies. But those very forces must not pay the price the SAF and Najibullah are asking for withdrawal. They must fight to maintain the campaign for women's rights. Against the *Loyah Jirga* they must fight for democratic rights for the masses. Against Najibullah's born again Islam they must fight for the complete separation of mosque and state.

Afghan society is desperately impoverished and devastated by civil war and the Soviet invasion. To make reform projects meaningful, to raise the material and cultural level of the masses Afghanistan needs a massive injection of aid for irrigation, mechanization and transport. Those who want to forestall a deal that will see power handed back to the traditional chiefs must demand that the USSR provide that aid with no strings. It likes to profess to its 'internationalist duty to Afghanistan'. Let it show it by providing the armaments, the troops and the aid Afghan progressive forces need to secure victory in the civil war. But let it do so without intervening in the political affairs of those defending themselves in that civil war. Real aid, and not political repression, can defeat reaction.

become Soviet-ringed encampments patrolled internally by the Afghan army and PDPA militia. To that extent the SAF still affords the progressive forces in the Afghan civil war a degree of immediate physical defence from the barbaric 'justice' intended for them by reaction. However, at the same time the Moscow bureaucrats through the agency of the SAF have increasingly ensured their own political control of the Afghan regime's policies.

## KARMAL REPLACED

In 1985 Babrak Karmal was removed from office. He was replaced by the Soviet trained head of the security police (KHAD) Najibullah. Under Najibullah, doubtless with the



complete backing of the USSR, the regime has attempted to ditch every remaining commitment to democratic reforms. The last woman in the Politburo—Anhita Ratebzad—has been removed from office. Overtures to the King have been increased under Najibullah who has said the monarch 'could play a big role in unifying the country'.

Najibullah committed the regime

see for yourselves that the government is protecting Islam.'

In order to enforce that message state TV has been bedecked with Islamic symbols. In addition Najibullah has declared his intention of convoking a grand assembly of tribal chiefs—the traditional *Loyah Jirga*. In fact the Afghan interim constitution instituted after the Soviet invasion calls that body 'the highest organ of state power.'

Such demands, it must be recognized, can only be wrung out of the USSR if the forces of progress in Afghanistan organise to fight for them independently. Our suspension of a call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops does not mean that we entrust the USSR with the fate of Afghanistan. On the contrary, the forces of progress in Afghanistan need to use the physical protection afforded by the presence of the SAF to build independent organisations—urban councils, workers' councils, independent militias etc. Such bodies alone can guard and extend all democratic and progressive social gains in Afghanistan. And the progressive forces themselves need to be broken from the PDPA's Stalinist inspired bureaucratic reform programme and won to a programme of real socialist revolution. Such a programme would have, as its point of departure, the recognition that, not least because of its terrible backwardness, Afghanistan's fate is inextricably bound up with the fate of the entire region within which it exists.

Afghanistan is a patchwork of peoples, a residue of imperialism's wars in the region. Its Pashtun people straddle the border with Pakistan. The northern Kirghiz, Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen peoples all have a majority of their population in the USSR. The Baluchis in the south west straddle the territory of Iran and Pakistan. The problems of the impoverishment and backwardness of the Afghan peoples can only be solved in the context of a revolutionary socialist federation of South West and Central Asia. This will only be won against the Afghan rebels, against Khomeini's Iran and against the reactionary regime in Pakistan. And it will have to be won against the plans of the Soviet bureaucracy to settle their Afghan problem hand in hand with those butchers.

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DUBLIN Tues. 15th March  
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Irish  
Workers  
Group

# Class Struggle

WITH THE Labour Party slightly up in the opinion polls and faced with the danger of a snap election, Dick Spring can hardly want a public fight with the Militant tendency. He is undoubtedly bent on directly controlling every section of the party from which left-wing criticism or dissent might be forthcoming, and to this end he has imposed a whole new set of controls designed to curb Labour Youth in which *Militant* enjoys complete control.

Every honest socialist in the labour and trade union movement will be outraged, therefore, at the connivance of the so-called Labour Left in new manoeuvres against *Militant*. It was in fact Emmet Stagg who took the initiative to stop *Militant* leader Joe Higgins from standing as one of the two Labour candidates in Dublin West.

In an unprincipled act of opportunism hard to surpass on the left, even of the Labour Party, the Kildare TD and self-proclaimed socialist Stagg organised with the right wing of the leadership to stand Joe Higgins down by suspending the Constituency Council. It was done as part of a package supposedly to review several constituency organisations in Dublin, but only Dublin West was actually suspended, unlike the utterly moribund North-West constituency. Stagg even arrogantly refused to give any political justification when asked by Joe Higgins at the Party's Administrative Council.

### OPPORTUNISM

Stagg's pretensions to lead a socialist 'left wing' in the Dáil are already extremely threadbare. For all his rhetoric on election night about *class* politics, his radical alternative policies for the economy have nothing to do with class struggle and in no way addresses the nature of the capitalist offensive that is under way. His increasing opportunism was underlined by refusing to co-sign the Clinics' Defence Campaign declaration because he said it would not help him in elections!

The shameful reality is that Stagg has calculated an advantage for his own faction in bureaucratically trouncing the *Militant* tendency in the party. In doing Spring's dirty work, however, he appears to overlook who holds the real bureaucratic power - the same

and Stagg. To concentrate activists in any area may be a sound policy in order to work openly and democratically in an important section of the working class. However, covert concentration of supporters simply to capture an electoral victory in a reformist party can only breed contempt among Labour members who have not been won to a fighting opposition to the right-wing politics of the Party.

Stagg's grouping believes also that, by breaking *Militant*'s organisational hold over Labour Youth, they can themselves capture the allegiance of a renewed youth movement, but again they ignore the substance of what

Spring is trying to accomplish in demolishing the political independence of the youth section.

When the Party conference imposed a new constitution on Labour Youth in September, the large vote in favour of referring it back showed that there had been a basis for a real mobilisation of youth against the move. *Militant*, however, have always put such an open fight against the leadership in second place to considerations of preserving their own organisational position. Believing they could still keep control of Labour Youth, *Militant* have not fought politically to rally wider opposition.

Joe Higgins' pseudo

'trottskyist' grouping has been a dead hand in Labour Youth. In flat contradiction to Trotsky's tactical use of *entryism* as a means to mobilise the best sections around an action programme in the class struggle, *Militant* has instead created a sect decked out in Marxist phraseology. In reality, it simply deludes young activists into believing that history itself will use *Militant* to transform the Party into a majority government that will introduce socialism through parliament!

In the end the youth section in which Stagg's faction hopes to secure the majority will be politically trussed up by Spring. The new arrangements

have only one positive feature — constructing more youth sections in instead of only one central group in each constituency. But the broader youth membership will find that Spring's party hacks will control their agenda!

They have even cut out the whole Sunday session from the annual weekend conference! Delegates will require fewer attendance credits in order to vote in the new National Youth Committee — a backward step designed to more easily rally conservative elements against *Militant* — but also against any 'left' wing in the long run. And this from people who accuse Joe Higgins of 'infiltrating' people into his local party!

Serious socialists in Labour Left, Labour Youth and in *Militant* itself must organise a fight to defy these measures which shorten the conference and take away youth control of the agenda and vetting of delegates.

Most importantly, they must openly fight to reinstate Joe Higgins immediately and to block the witch-hunt against *Militant*. But they will need to beware of and criticize *Militant*'s own reluctance to fight politically to defend such principles.

- Fight to re-instate Higgins as candidate in Dublin West!
- Labour Youth must control its own conference totally!
- Mobilise on fighting policies of class struggle, against the Party's right-wing parliamentary opportunism!
- Fight for an independent revolutionary youth movement in the working class.

## Defend Lesbians and Gays!

THE NEW Local Government Bill being introduced by the Tories and the recent refusal by the Joint Board at Maynooth College to recognize the student Gay Society are reminders that gay oppression is being actively maintained on both sides of the border.

In the new Local Government Bill, clause 27/28 states that "a local authority shall not promote homosexuality or publish material for the promotion of homosexuality (or) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship by the publication of such material or other-

wise." The clause reinforces the backward prejudice that sees homosexuality as a perversion. It aims to give encouragement to those who are in a position to censor and ban the books and literature of lesbians and gay men, and sack people for their homosexual orientation.

The same backwoods mentality has spurred the Catholic hierarchy's college board in Maynooth to refuse recognition and capitation funds to the Gay Society - a society with no less than 176 members. The board was heard to say that they did not want the college, which houses seminarians as well as non-clerical students, to be

come the target of "barrack-room humour". No indeed! Better to share in the barrack-room humour by isolating gays!

Cardinal Ratzinger, one of the Pope's right hand men recently put his attitude towards lesbians and gays in the clearest terms by suggesting that "we should not be surprised when irrational and violent reactions increase when they attempt to secure civil legislation".

This odious alliance of right wing Toryism and Catholic backwardness directed against the sexually oppressed will serve to sustain the kind of violent attacks that we saw in the case of

the Fairview Park murder. Violence against gays is on the increase everywhere.

Socialists, trade unionists and students must join hands with the sexually oppressed in fighting against Clause 27/28 as well as fighting for the repeal of the 1861 Act banning homosexuality in Ireland and an end to all legal shackles on the free expression of sexuality. Students too must fight against clerical sectarianism in colleges and fight to reverse such blatantly reactionary decisions as we've seen in Maynooth last month.